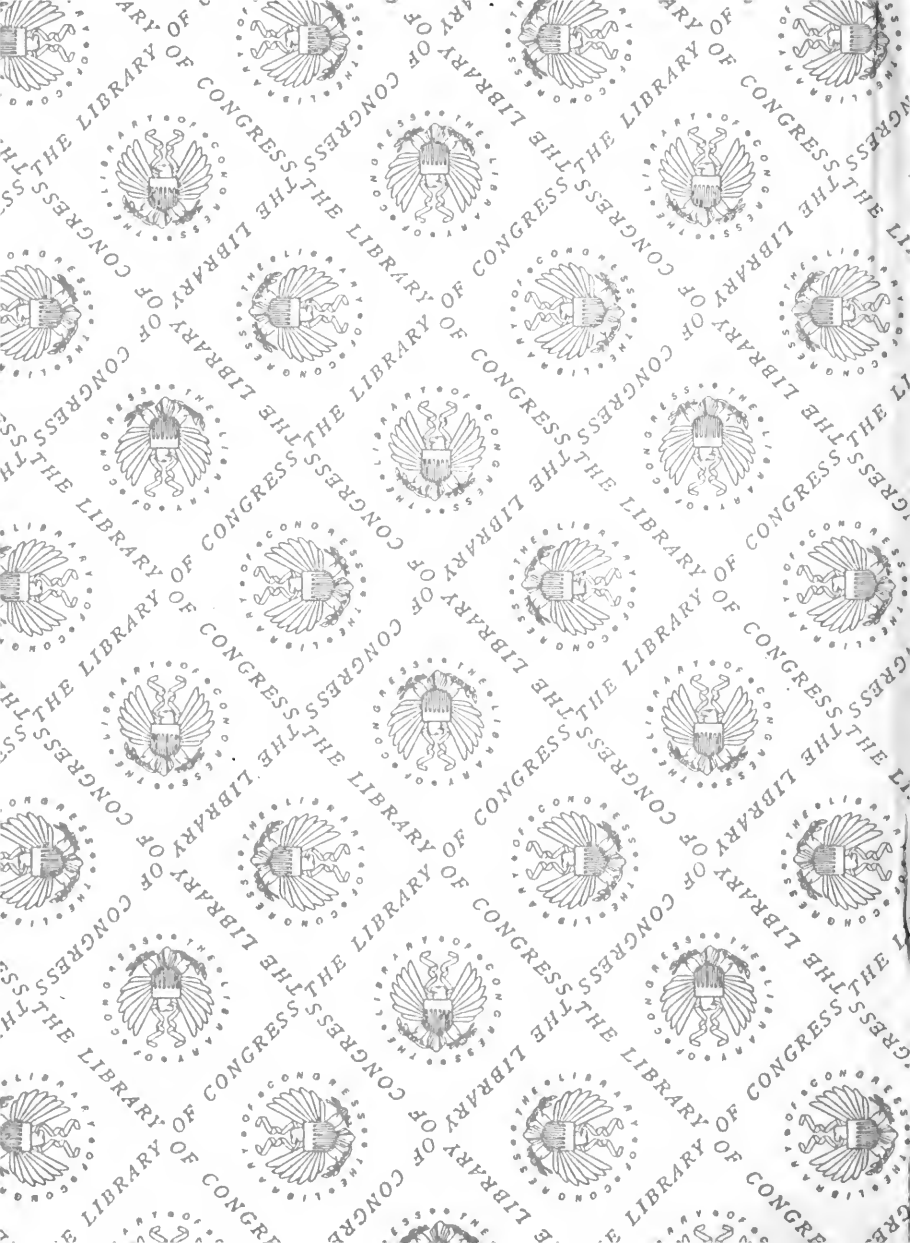
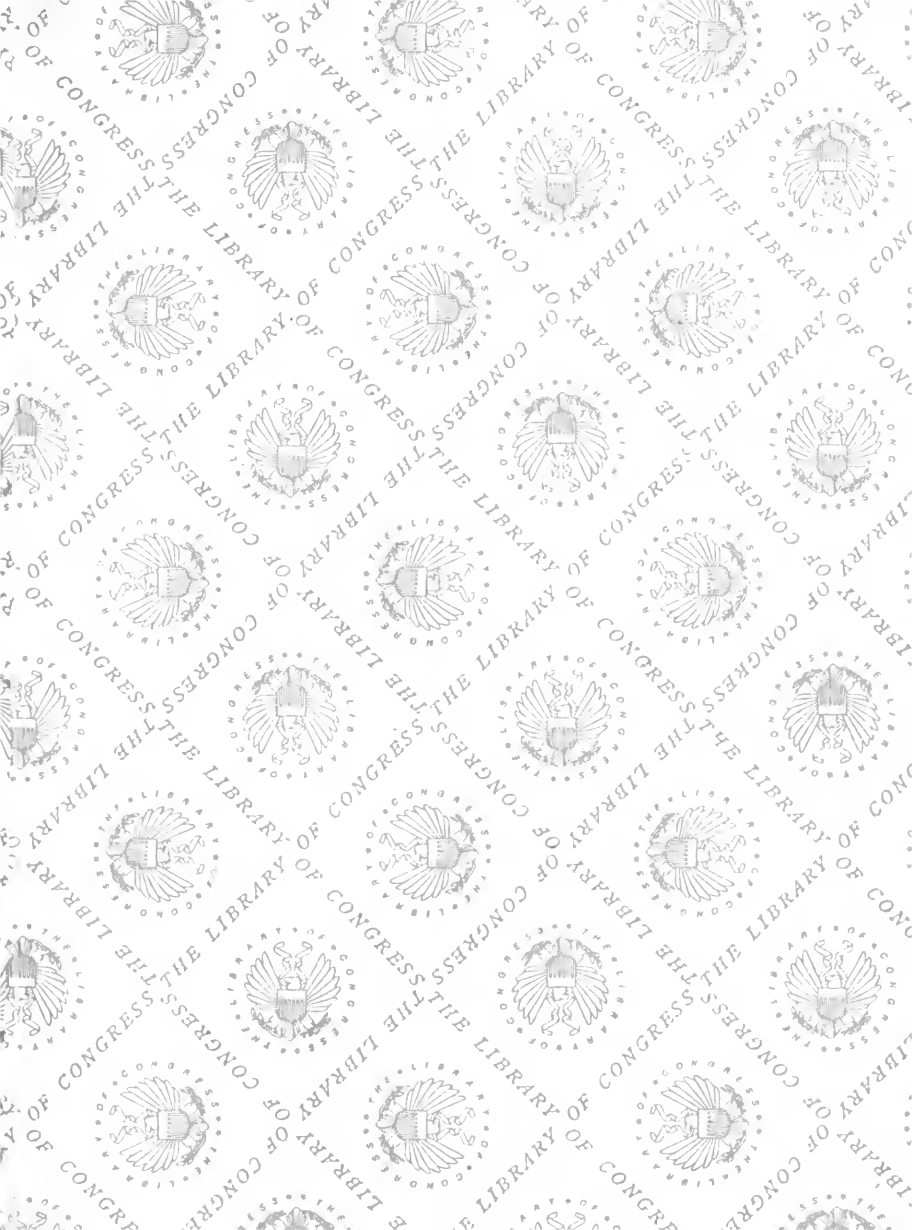


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IN THE HEART OF AMERICA



BY...
LILLIAN ROZELL MESSENGER



"In The Heart of America."

. . . By . . .

Lillian Rozell Messenger.

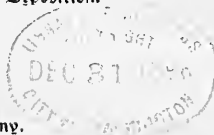
Author of "Fragments from an Old Inn," "Columbus," "The Southern
Cross," etc., etc.

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Illustrated by Geo. V. Coffin.

This Poem was read at the Atlanta Exposition.

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BY

LILLIAN ROZELL MESSENGER.

Wash. D.C.

“ Lo, with the ancient
Roots of man's nature,
Twines the eternal
Passion of song.

“ Ever love fans it,
Ever life feeds it,
Time cannot age it,
Death cannot slay.

“ Deep in the world-heart
Stand its foundations,
Tangled with all things,
Twin-made with all.”



IN THE HEART OF AMERICA.

BY LILLIAN ROZELL MESSENGER.



AR from the noisy marts of men he fled
To God's fresh world of forest green, where spring

And broad-leav'd summer met in loving peace;
He paused beside a lonely cabin closed,
Deserted, still; his old gray jacket worn
The story told of why he mused in tears.

As plainly as the tangled garden wild—
Its silent paths, and broken gate, and well
Whereto nor maid, nor mother came to draw—
Spake where war's demon swept its stormy wing.

He brush'd his tears with empty sleeve, and slow,
And softly spake, seeing my heart attuned
To hear his lay; and, whether angel, man,
Or spirit from far realms, I scarce may tell
For beauty of his soul, his tones divine
Low whispered 'tween the hymns of morning birds,
In dreamful awe, I heard his wondrous song:

“When dawn shall widen into perfect day,”

This sung its music through my heart, and gave
My soul and spirit strength to welcome death!
Since Sorrow's hand had buried all the light
That follows life—these words came wing'd with dawn!

I seemed new-borne between two mystic orbs
Of heaven or earth, of faith and sense, whereby
Swept rushing, awful, lovely spirit wings
Uplifting me, while gleaming wheels of flame

Bore on, and on, and clove the upper deep,
Whose music and fine light cut paths

Through highways terrible yet beautiful,
As th' mazed soul o'erwrought touch'd fire divine,
Caught up in mysteries I dare not name,

And quickly now beheld and read strange lines
Of fate, born of the dim and far unknown,
To stir hid vision, and the soul to daze.

I saw the ocean dim in purple dark
Hold to its breast the morning star ablaze—
Fit type, I breathed of chaos and of man—

The page of myst'ry ever open spread
Yet never read save by th' Eternal eye.

The wheels sped on through purpling pearl and gray;
The vision came apace, but I would on,
To one sweet clime athrob with Summer's heart.

I saw the lightning fierce, God's scimitar,
Smite sharp the dusk, and cleave the darker sea;
A storm cloud in the dim southwest rose high
In sullen wrath to crush the blooming dawn,

But fell, and 'neath golden lances strong
Of day's sentries; 'thence in the break of light
I followed far, while all the matin birds
Did praise their God, and praise their leafy homes,
And sing for love of song, and love, and life!

Far lands and glory-climes may boast their songs
Of lovely throated things in rainbow hues—
Of Eden birds, of lark and nightingale,

The mocking-bird's the South's own wingèd voice;
He thrills the fragrant clime at morn and noon
At will, and greets the angel of the dawn;
And midnights blue, full of deep summer's breath.
There canopied in moonlight's gentle gold,
He wafts such songs to love,—to Nature's ear,
That in delight, and fear, the human soul
Caught in its magic spell, listens in awe,
In wonderment—whence came this minstrel true.

' Of every note he trills exultant songs,
' As tho' the scents of flow'rs, the sigh of winds,
' The plaint of doves, of streamlets gay and sad—
' The moan of seas, the moan of lost, lost loves,
' Had made divine this winged melody!



All rare sweet flow'rs like vari-color'd flame
Burn'd thro' perfumed air as the dreaming South
With large and radiant eyes sent back their smiles—
In exaltation press'd them to her lips.

This beauteous South, the poet-child of Pan,
Who holds the sylvan harps of secret song
To the world's deep soul—her great eyes telling not

What dawns they see beyond the old gray plains
Of earth's sad past, and o'er which burn the stars
Of men's true joy, and perfect, endless song.

At last, I found, by rolling wood and plain
A little plot of rural paradise;

Rich odors shed by fragrant tangled wilds
And trees in august splendours bending o'er

The songful stream's full heart of music told,
With songs of mocking-birds, this is the land,
The land of beauty, rest, and faith, and dreams !

This is the land where time and chaos paused
In mad'ning whirl, to plant the rose and gem,
The lilies rare of every hue and clime
On Nature's brow, and in her greening fields,
On mountain side, leave tender lyres of song:—

The land which troubadours and that great host
Of Troy who fought and fell for Helen's face,
Could well have loved, then died for truer weal.



This land which men shall call the heart and soul
Of all America, so grand in youth,
In beauty, majesty, and power supreme:

With feet that touch the tropic island-seas,
Whose flowered breeze fans her young morning mind
A-fire with starry thought, and dream, to gild
That dawn which breaks for earth's and man's new day!

The land whose might, and beauty-forces gave
Us Freedom's architects in Jefferson
And Washington, Monroe, Lincoln, and Lee,
And lesser Masons true, who wrought and framed
This fane, that close to God's right hand shall rise.

Hard by a giant oak, that coil'd its roots
In forms grotesque, grew moss so delicate,
So soft, and sweet, a lady's cheek might rest

Its crimson down thereon, this dainty couch
My rest for weary limbs, and burning brain.

In soft green glooms above, shone gold-white globes
Of sweet magnolia blooms; and trailing vines

Mimosa-wreath'd, that shed the rainbow's hues,
Fall'n in May, from Spring's fair rosy form.

Through meadows' balmy calm, the streamlet ran
Its gentle minor tones, and made complete

A magic charm, so still, one almost heard
Love-flowers breathe their early sighs to winds
Just half awake, to meet the tip-toe dawn.

And pausing there at peace, yet hearing sounds
That seemed to steal from spirits everywhere
I heard a whisper faint:

“ Here crossed this stream
Two armies vast, their sabres smote in twain
The bands of years, and struck the centuries.
The world says one was right, the other wrong;

“ But, right and wrong, *man's wrath shall praise Him still*,
And thus come Law.” Again I heard the roll
It seemed of far-off battle shock and doom,
The tumult, roar, and tempest rain of war.

Then suddenly a warbling voice broke in
Soft ripples of low song; a little maid,
Fifteen fair summers on her golden head,

Pass'd on her flow'ry way, a winged joy—
Like hope, pale angel, flashing by the night
Of soul despair, when all save hope is dead—

This little song she sung, half sad, half glad;
Tender as whisp'ring waters in dim light
When clasping eve's first trembling glory-stars: . . .

“ In the meadows, in the meadows
Where I chase the leafy shadows,
I go singing all the day!
And though so happy still, a-laughing with the rill,
And singing low with bird and bee,
I sigh with yonder dove,



And like the distant sea,
 I pine, I pine always
 With no true heart to love.

Down the fields and in the meadows,
 Still I chase the bees and shadows,
 And I catch the soft winds fleet;
 I kiss the flowers sweet;
And the birdlings know I love them every day.
 But sing how'er I will
 My heart is lonely still,
And I pine, I pine always,
 And sigh as yonder dove,
 For never cometh to me,
 From all this bright mystery,
To set me free, the soul of love !''

A voice of Heav'n, I sighed; then all was still;
As if the gazing day held breath for joy.

Her woman's heart calls for its destiny;
O woman, woman, mother of this world!
And nearest yet to God's right hand of pow'r—
Sustain, create, endow the higher will.

Till man, made pure by sorrow, and sublime
Through conquered ills, shall lose the taint of sin,
Shall lift the cup of every perfect joy
Full to the lips of sweet immortal Life.

Just then morn's ray a silver lance fell down
And tipped the graceful head of one shy faun
Beside the stream. But, strong and awesome now,

The vision holding all my sense and soul
In thrall, in wonderment, I turned from these,
Turned from the mock-birds' jubilee of song—
All subtlest beauty-work of Nature plann'd
In this rare land where mystic robes once trail'd
The skies (haply seraphic hosts, and left
Mere semblance of their own celestial clime)—

To hear the voice, to see the visions throng;
And gliding down soft mystic silences,

Colossal, grand, they seemed to steal from four
Vast corners of the world. I gazed like one
Of old, and dumb, by Chebar's holy stream.

Then, aureoled in dim celestial light
I could not name—so beautiful, mine eyes
Were nigh to fail—loomed up the face and form
Of Freedom's son, who fell in th' sword-glare

Flashed back from War's dread form and crimson steel
Th' assassin drew. His eyes were Sorrow's own—
Vision-enthralled,—seeing hid fate that none
Save his prophetic mind divinely read.

And, while I marveled o'er that dreadful doom,
One whispered low: "It must be thus that he,
Great son and heir of Liberty, should fall
To rise sublime, and wear the martyr's crown,
And light new dawn to human hope, and light
The stars that blazon Freedom's path thro' Time,
And light true men to brotherhood and God!"

Much woe, and looking on the tragic glooms
Of war, had chasten'd long both soul and sense.

I could have cried for joy, still thinking o'er
"All Truth is Change," as sung the lofty bard
Who struck Eöonian music down this age,
Through Locksley Hall, and Idylls not the King's
But wisdom's and high truth's:—

——, from distances
That glowed more lovely, hour on hour, and thrill'd
The space, and all my being stirred in awe,
With music's passion and own purity,

I saw the dim verge hide receding hosts,
Of Washington, and heroes old who fought
For Freedom's greatest throne. "Ah, yes," I cried,

"This was the new world's morning jubilee!
'Twas nearer noon when civil strife broke out—
But these last failed—how can the right e'er fail?"
I spake to him who stood, the Gabriel
Of this strange hour and revelation strange.

"Not fail," he breathed in softest music-tone.
"Dare mortal men to say these failed—were wrong?
Since imperfection and unwisdom, both,
Of brothers held in deadly war God takes
To round His perfect trinity of Law!"

Still I, in fiery spirit-flame enwreathed,
Heard secret truths, saw visions come and go.



Be this, I sighed, the mirage of this land
Where beauty, song, and life affluent woos
The trancèd soul, to leap the body's bounds,
In freedom pass the golden gates of Time,
Like fleeing birds lost in the sunset's fire!

On southwest breeze, a tide of harmonies,
Blown soft from flute and viol in Love's land,
Just hid beyond aërial ruby walls,
Enticed my sense and soul to look that way;

While music blew from feathery throngs afar
Sweet melodies without the passion-woe
That thrills in every tone, and song man sings
From that hid lyre, spun of immortal chords.

The spirit touch'd mine eyes, and lo, I saw
A vasty troop of warriors clad in gray
Led by their grand old chieftain—tower of strength—
Virginia's son; thence followed scores of men
Ay, hundreds, all of noblest make and mould
Of lofty mien, to die for faith and right.

They smiled at death! Their bruised, bleeding steps
Left shining paths that sloped thro' space and time,
And blent with one high, gleaming way, that leads
Straight to God's realm of vast, undying light:

For every crimson drop shall flowers bloom;
For every sorrow-pang shall yet be born
Fresh pæans, thro' Life's hollow vaults to ring,—
Rich music unto heavenly fluted domes.

The Puritan cast off old shields of Faith,
Writ o'er with quaint device, and ancient rune,
Scripture-word, symbol, and prophet-line
That faded 'neath the light of truth new-born!

The Cavalier of olden time and song
Broke his keen lance, and blade, in trust sublime
Of quick'n'd pow'rs, and new divine decrees;
Henceforth to toil for humankind, and good,
And in the Real, to fresh song man attune.

Away, far in the misty, glowing realm
As though a dream were fallen thro' a dream,
I pictured saw the heroes one and all—
(The captains, chieftains, smiling youth, and age),
Bid home farewell, and mother, wife, and babe,
And in the vine-clad gate send back sad smiles
That hid their tears, and love's slow parting sighs.

The little cot upon the mountain side
Sent forth its sire and son; the lordly home
Gave men, and treasure full; and faithful all.

From Carolina's purple pride, and where
The Mexic gulf dipped orient sands and warm,
To western lands of hardy hope and pow'r,

And star-plum'd hills of sturdy Tennessee,
Kentucky's fields, and Alabama's rest,
And Texas' wide majestic sunny plains,

They marched in banner'd splendid army file.
I sighed, "Can these be evil, vile and curs'd?
Where'er was nobler love and valor found
Than that which crown'd the worth of Southern braves?"

The voice again: "They met a val'rous foe,
And both were true, and both were wrong
That wrath of man might his Creator praise,
"And brother-love might reign in right supreme;
And Love, thro' battle-storm should will to earth
This Brotherhood of man—superb in love!"

Then, high o'er all the vasty, misty gray,
Dark-red phantom-wings of War's archangel sped,
As clearer, grander shone the heavens wide
Where time, and song, and faith made spaces clean
For swift white feet of Peace and Truth to tread.

Day glided past; the visions came apace;
The tender air thrilled to the moonbeam's kiss—
The moonlight! how it mellows every scene
With Poesy that Heaven itself might love!

'Tis like a spirit-mantle cloth of gold,
Love brings with tender hand and softly throws
O'er bruised limb, or hoary, failing one,
As o'er some templed god the most adored.

A flood of light! and soon three golden gates
Above the thrilling skies of purpling gloom
Spread wide—with name and meaning written thus:
"These gates of Beauty, Justice, Love, but ope
To true unselfish souls who died for men."

Then all the loveliest vales of Heaven shone—
Were shadowing with wings, till glory-rays,
Tho' gentle, smote the gaze, as pass'd and pass'd
The freed and lofty souls in living light;

Whence, down the shining plains a city new
Mine eyes beheld which man hath measured not—
City of Brother Love, sublimely fair,
More beautiful than prophet, priest or king
Had ever dreamed or reared in Orient clime.

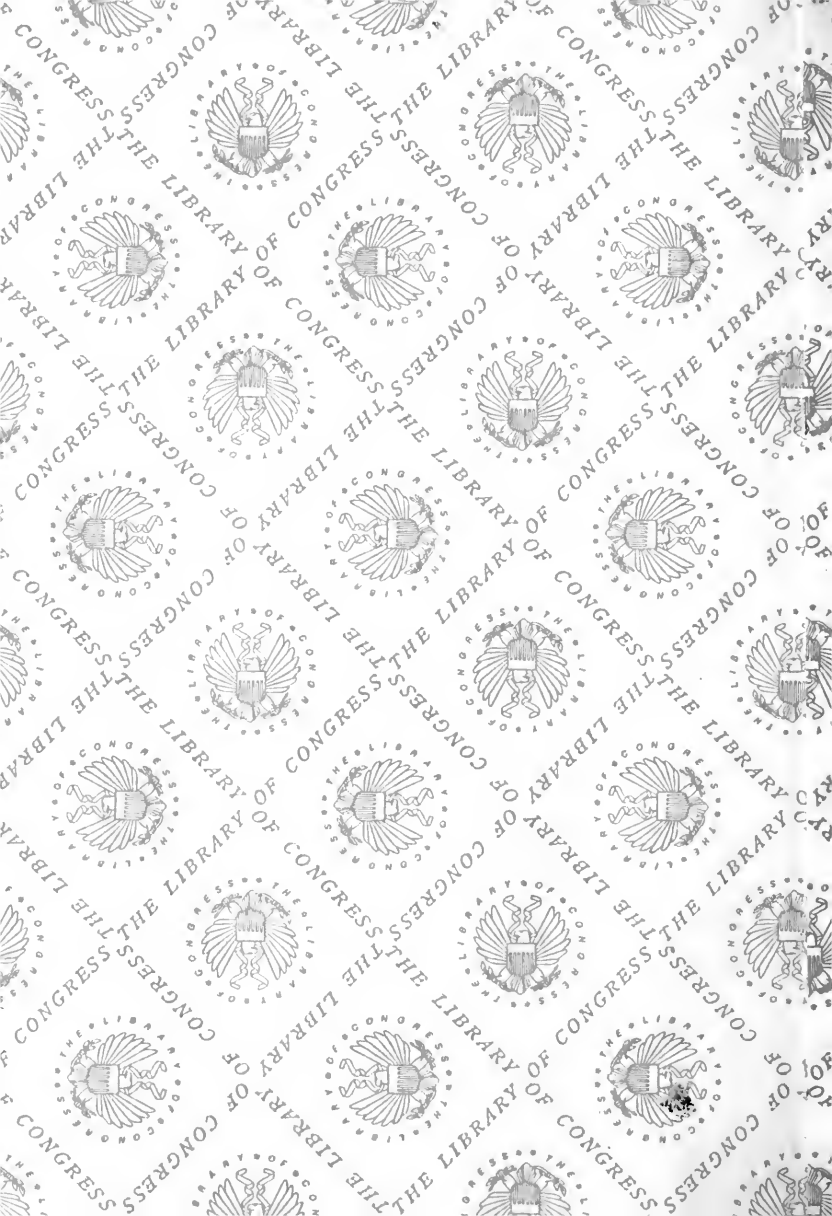
Its scores of tow'rs aërial uprose
From jasper walls of God's own perfect plan,
And soaring spires and pinnacles shone far,

And, high above the stars, made pale their light,
On snowy banners, writ in burning gold
That dazzled Heaven's vault, were messages
Of love divine for men. From tow'r and dome

And minarets sublimely shone the bloom
Of gorgeous colors all, whence spirits rare
Of faith, and hope, and joy, sent forth their songs
To woo, and guide immortals of this world.

Nor day, nor night, shall close the portals grand
Of th' city Brother-Love;—His word hath said
Man's wrath shall praise Him 'bove all human law,
In realms eternal, beautiful, where Death
Never was, nor shall ever, ever be.





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